



Basic Chainmail

Written By: Annalee Newitz



TOOLS:

- [Dowel \(1\)](#)
[which you can hold in place with a rack](#)
[or some other device](#)
- [Hammer \(1\)](#)
- [Needle Nose Pliers \(1\)](#)
- [Rod Clamp \(1\)](#)
- [Wire Snipper \(1\)](#)
[for cutting wire rods or coat hangers](#)



PARTS:

- [Wire hanger \(15\)](#)
[or several feet of stripped aluminum wire](#)
[or junk wire that you want to recycle. Or](#)
[you can buy pre-made steel rings from](#)
<http://chainmail.com>.

SUMMARY

Henrik Olsgaard, aka Henrik of Havn, has been proclaimed King of the West six times. Obviously the guy is deft with a sword — you don't get to be King in the Society for Creative Anachronism (SCA) without winning several bouts in the annual Crown Tournament. But his triumph is also testimony to his skill at making chainmail. Henrik has been fashioning chainmail of every description for the past four decades — from beautiful, sterling silver belts to a 50-pound battle hauberk (a knee-length shirt).

And now, I'm going to teach you what he taught me: how to make your own chainmail. With just a few basic patterns, you'll have all the knowledge you need to fashion a helmet, shirt, belt, coin purse, and even a full hauberk.

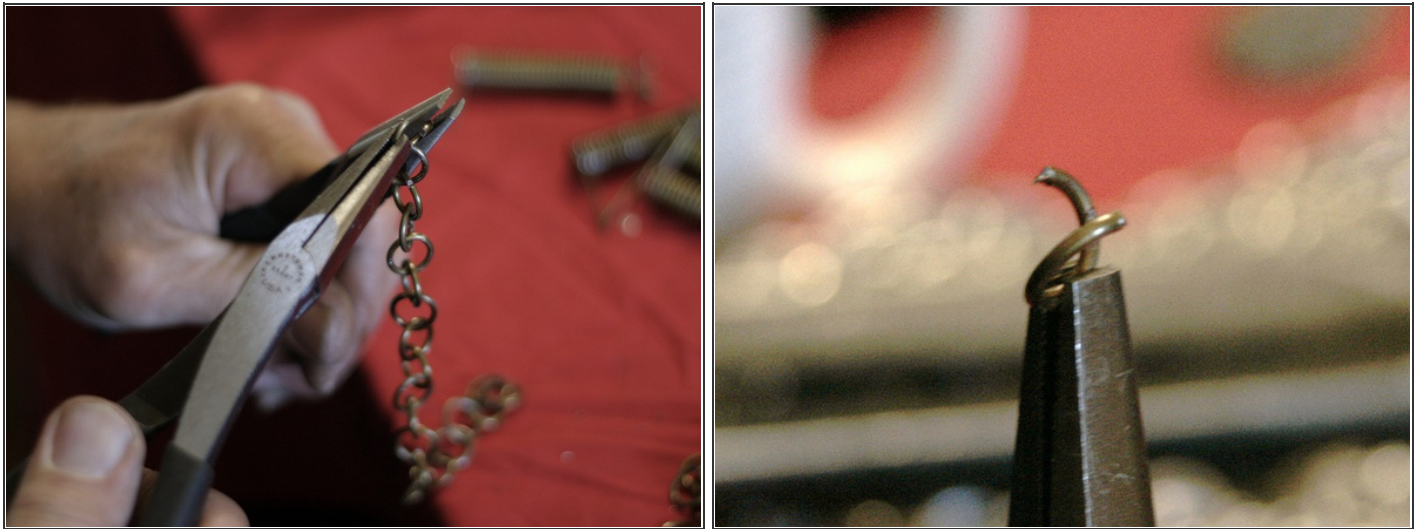
Step 1 — Buy or make your own rings.



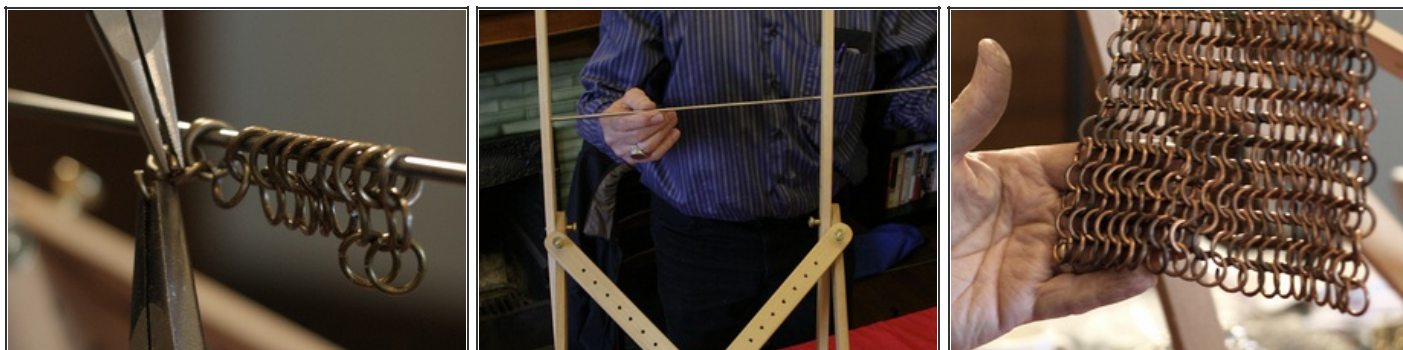
- For this project, we'll create square and triangular swatches of chainmail, which are the basic building blocks for anything larger. There are two ways to go about this: you can make your own rings from stripped aluminum electrical wire, store-bought wire, or coat hangers, or you can buy the rings ready-made from sources like <http://chainmail.com>.
- If you'd like to create your own rings, begin with the wire of your choice. For lighter pieces, you might try aluminum wire. Most mail makers prefer steel. To create the rings, wind your wire around a rod, then flatten the end with a hammer and hold it in place with a small rod clamp.
- As you wind, you're creating a high-tension spring — if you slip, the wire can snap back at you quickly.
- Next, you'll want to slip the coil off your rod and use a wire snipper to cut the rings.
- Be sure, as you're cutting, that you are creating full rings and not leaving gaps.
- Shortcut: Some armor makers cut their rings out of door springs.



Step 2 — Knit your rings into chainmail swatches.



- Once you have a few hundred rings, you're ready to start knitting (for reference, a full hauberk takes about 10,200 rings). To do this, you'll start by creating a small length of chain using 2 needle-nose pliers to open and close each ring — this is the knitting part. When you pull the rings open, be sure to open them sideways.

Step 3 — Knit your rings into chainmail swatches (cont'd).

- Your first string should be twice as long as the first row in the swatch you'll be making. For this exercise, we chose to make the string 20 rings long, for a 10-ring row. Once you have your string, you'll want to thread it onto a thin rod so that it hangs properly as you add length. Henrik's knitting rig is typical — he's got two uprights with holes in them to place the rod into. But you can use literally anything that will hold your rod in place as you work, including simply taping it to 2 boxes.
- To create the first 2 rows, you should thread every other ring, thus creating the kind of design shown.
- This is the beginning of the "four in one" pattern you'll use for the rest of your swatch. When you make your next row, you'll want each ring to link to 2 others. Each ring on the second row should have 4 rings in it.
- If you want to make a square, every other row should begin with a ring that only holds one ring from the row above, as described thus far. But for a triangle, you want to shrink each row by 2. So you'll start each row with a ring that connects 2 from the row above. Keep knitting until you have a square or triangle of the size you wish.

Step 4 — Connect swatches to make armor (or anything metallic!).



- Now that you're practiced, you're ready to pick a pattern and start making something other than a square or triangular swatch. The image shows how triangles and squares can fit together to create other shapes. There are several sites that offer patterns you can choose from, including <http://theringlord.com>, which sells armor supplies and pattern books and hosts a community forum, as does <http://artofchainmail.com>.

Henrik says that the best part of chainmail making is getting a chance to wear and use it with friends. "I don't like getting in front of paying audiences to do this," he explains. "I like to share what I've done at SCA tournaments and places where everybody participates in the event." And that's where I find him, in full armor, a few weeks after our lesson.

This project first appeared in [CRAFT Volume 01](#), page 115.

This document was last generated on 2012-11-03 02:39:21 AM.